

Corporation for National and Community Service

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DATE: October 26, 2017
TO: Potential New AmeriCorps VISTA Sponsor Organizations
FROM: Washington State Office of the Corporation for National and Community Service
SUBJECT: **Request for Concept Papers (RFCP) for New AmeriCorps VISTA Projects**
Submission Deadline: November 29, 2017

INTRODUCTION

The Washington State Office of the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) announces the opportunity, subject to availability of resources, to develop and sponsor new AmeriCorps VISTA projects in the state. The Washington State Office seeks concept papers for the AmeriCorps VISTA program from innovative, high-performing and outcome-driven organizations that share the VISTA mission to provide long term solutions to poverty. **This Request for Concept Papers is open to organizations that are not current VISTA sponsors.**

AGENCY DESCRIPTION

The Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) is a federal government agency that engages more than five million Americans in service through its core programs: AmeriCorps and Senior Corps. As the nation's largest grant-maker for service and volunteering, CNCS plays a critical role in strengthening America's nonprofit sector and addressing our nation's challenges through service. The mission of CNCS is to improve lives, strengthen communities, and foster civic engagement through service and volunteering.

AMERICORPS VISTA PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

AmeriCorps VISTA is a highly professional and rigorous volunteer service program, through which national service members serve with organizations full time for one year. VISTA projects focus on building permanent capacity and infrastructure in nonprofit and other organizations to help more effectively bring individuals and communities out of poverty.

The AmeriCorps VISTA program places VISTA members at sponsoring organizations that absorb most of the costs related to project supervision and logistical support. VISTA provides a small living allowance and certain benefits for members. Investment by the sponsoring organization and the community is fundamental to the VISTA program, as the VISTA resources are intended to be short-term.

ELIGIBLE SPONSORS

Public organizations such as state and local government organizations, Indian Tribes, and nonprofit private organizations may apply to be AmeriCorps VISTA project sponsors. Please note that eligible nonprofit private organizations are not limited to those with IRS 501(c)(3) status, but rather all organizations with IRS 501(c) status that focus on anti-poverty community development. Organizations that focus solely on advocacy and lobbying are not eligible.

VISTA project sponsors must be able to direct the project, recruit and supervise the VISTA members, and provide necessary administrative support to complete the goals of the VISTA project. Project sponsors develop and manage projects with the involvement of the communities that will be served. The goal for every VISTA project is for the sponsoring organization to sustain the VISTA member's outcomes beyond the service term. Organizations that have

previously sponsored VISTA projects (or hosted VISTA members) may apply with a new project or program emphasis. Organizations interested in becoming a sponsor should review all resources in this email and in the attached program guidance document.

AMERICORPS VISTA FRAMEWORK

Projects must be developed in accordance with AmeriCorps VISTA's core principles:

Anti-Poverty Focus – The purpose of VISTA is to support efforts to fight poverty. Any nonprofit organization, educational institution, tribal, or public agency with a program that is poverty-related in scope may be considered for VISTA project sponsorship. The project should address helping individuals and communities out of poverty, not simply making poverty more tolerable through short-term services.

Community Empowerment – Sponsoring organizations ensure that the VISTA project engages residents of low-income communities in planning, developing, and implementing the project. The project must be responsive and relevant to the lives of the community residents, and should tap into inherent community assets, strengths, and resources.

Capacity Building – VISTA members do not provide direct services to low-income individuals; rather, they work to increase the capacity of organizations to fight poverty. Through activities such as fundraising, establishment of community volunteer recruitment and management systems, community outreach, and collaborative development, VISTA members mobilize local resources to achieve lasting solutions to poverty. Projects focus on achieving impactful outcomes on the community and/or beneficiary population.

Sustainable Solutions – VISTA members provide short-term human resources to build long-term sustainability of anti-poverty programs. All VISTA projects should be developed with the goal to phase out the need for VISTA members and strengthen the ability of the project to continue without VISTA support.

PROJECT REQUIREMENTS

The WA State Office will select applications from those organizations that demonstrate the greatest ability to effectively manage the project with a high probability of success; have the greatest impact on low-income communities; and address focus areas in the [AmeriCorps VISTA FY2018 Program Guidance](#). An AmeriCorps VISTA project may be continued for up to three years; however, projects are considered for renewal on a year-to-year basis, depending on the availability of resources, program performance, and the priorities of CNCS. Programming should be based primarily on addressing local needs with the intention of creating a geographically and programmatically diversified portfolio. Additional considerations are indicated in the programmatic focus areas. To be considered as a VISTA sponsoring organization, an applicant should meet all the requirements of sponsorship listed in the [Concept Paper and Application for Federal Assistance](#).

Sponsors who wish to apply for three (3) or fewer VISTA members are encouraged to partner with other organizations on a multi-site project application, or should contact the WA State Office to discuss other opportunities for project development. Additionally, those applicants that apply for fewer than three (3) as a sole organization may be considered for inclusion under a new or existing intermediary VISTA sponsor. Intermediaries may have additional expectations and responsibilities that would be outlined in advance during the full application stage.

COST SHARE PARTNERSHIP

As a federally funded program, AmeriCorps VISTA receives a limited financial allocation each year to support VISTA projects around the country. VISTA is able to increase its reach in supporting anti-poverty programs by leveraging resources through cost-share partnerships. Thus we are seeking sponsors with the capacity to Cost Share 2 or more VISTA positions in year one. It is expected that in years 2 and 3 of VISTA programming, the number of cost share VISTA members may increase.

As a cost share partner, a sponsor contributes the living allowance of one or more of its VISTA members. This allows CNCS to maximize federal resources and to keep the federal cost of VISTA members to a minimum. Currently, the living allowances for Washington VISTA members ranges from \$12,321-\$17,592 per year per VISTA depending on the County. Please note that the cost share sponsor's portion does not have to be paid up front, rather sponsors are invoiced on a regular basis (typically every two weeks).

Below is a chart of the biweekly and annual reimbursement commitment.

Bi-Weekly/Annual Commitment	County
\$589 Biweekly – \$14,136 Annually	Clark & Skamania
\$733 Biweekly – \$17,592 Annually	King & Snohomish
\$534.50 Biweekly – \$12,828 Annually	Pierce
\$513 Biweekly – \$12,312 Annually	All other counties

While not a requirement, organizations that are able to financially support a VISTA member's living allowance (cost share) should indicate that intention in the concept paper. Organizations that are able to cost share will receive priority consideration.

VISTA PROGRAMMING PRIORITIES FOR FY2018

The Washington State Office is currently accepting Concept Papers that propose to address one or more of the following CNCS focus areas. Additional details are outlined in the attached FY2018 VISTA Programming Guidance document.

- **Economic Opportunity**
- **Education**
- **Healthy Futures**
- **Veterans and Military Families**

Additionally, the Washington State Office will prioritize developing Concept Paper applications that propose one of the following:

1. Programs focused on Opioid Programming will be prioritized;
2. Serving as intermediary for 3 or more organizations;
3. Cost Sharing 2 or more VISTA members;
4. Placing a minimum of 4 VISTA members;
5. Meeting needs in communities dealing with concentrated poverty. This is defined as Census tracts or counties with 20 percent or higher poverty rates. These can be rural or urban areas and the projects can be located in or serve the high-poverty areas. Further consideration will be given to persistent poverty areas – those that have had a poverty level of 20 percent or higher for 30 years or more. To assist in targeting these areas, USDA has developed a concentrated [Poverty Mapping Tool](#) that provides a way to identify them easily. Also you can use the Economic Security Index – <http://www.basiceconomicsecurity.org> to make the case that your agency is proposing to serve a group or community that meets our priority to address persistent and concentrative poverty.

CNCS PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENTS

The CNCS Performance Measurement framework provides a common focal point for CNCS' work across all programs and initiatives. CNCS has a focused set of Agency-Wide Priority Measures derived from its [Strategic Plan](#). Every VISTA project is expected to incorporate one or more aligned performance measures into the full grant application. For more information, see the resources section below for the link to Performance Measure resources.

CRITERIA FOR APPROVAL

Criteria for approval are based on whether the proposed project does the following:

- Fits with one or more of the Corporation's strategic initiative focus areas, VISTA programming priorities, or priority areas listed in the introduction section of this document. This must be clearly documented in the Concept Paper.
- Addresses the needs of low-income communities.
- Leads to building organizational capacity so that the project can continue once VISTA resources are withdrawn.
- Involves beneficiaries of the service and the low-income community in project development and implementation. This is required and must be noted in the Concept Paper in the Strengthening Communities section. If the organization's board of directors does not consist of at least 51% of the low-income beneficiary community, the sponsor must create an Advisory Council with a composition of at least 51% of its members from the low-income community. The board or advisory council must review and provide written comments concerning the project application prior to submission. A copy of these comments will be a required attachment of any full application submitted.
- Is designed to generate public and/or private-sector resources.
- Promotes local volunteer service.
- Complies with the provisions of the Domestic Volunteer Service Act of 1973, as amended; 2009 Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act, VISTA regulations; and VISTA policies.

Further criteria for determining approval are based on whether the applicant meets the following:

- Is a local or state government agency, Tribe, or a private organization designated as a non-profit by the Internal Revenue Service
- Has resources available for VISTAs to perform their activities, such as space, supplies, and on-the-job transportation, and is able to provide emergency cash advances when needed
- Has the management capacity and commitment to recruit, train, supervise, and otherwise support VISTAs recruited locally and nationally.
- Clearly outline how the VISTA project will establish a recruitment schedule and onboarding process.
- Understands and is committed to promoting national and community service
- Has the capacity to build community partnerships and collaborative efforts to achieve project self-sufficiency.

As previously mentioned, VISTA projects have an average lifecycle of three years unless the applicant is serving as an intermediary agency. New project development occurs annually and is always subject to availability of resources. The Washington State Office strives to ensure that the portfolio of VISTA projects is diverse, both in terms of programmatic areas as well as geography. An additional factor we consider is the type of sponsor: from small grassroots organizations to large intermediary organizations.

APPLICATION PROCESS

Applying for AmeriCorps VISTA is a multi-step process. Organizations interested in sponsoring a VISTA project need to submit a concept paper in eGrants to be considered. Concept papers should be no more than 6-8 pages in length (when printed in PDF form from eGrants).

- [Create an eGrants account](#), if your organization does not have one
- [Download the Concept Paper Instructions](#)
- Once in eGrants, select the **"2018 AmeriCorps VISTA STATE"** for the Concept Paper

Only concept papers submitted by 5:00 p.m. ET on December 4, 2017, will be considered. The submission of a concept paper does not guarantee approval or commitment of VISTA resources. Each submission is evaluated on its merits and is subject to the availability of resources. If the concept paper is approved, the organization will be invited to submit a full application to the Washington State Office for review and approval.

During the week of December 18th, the Washington State Office staff will notify organizations on the status of their Concept Papers. If successful and the concept paper has been approved, the Washington State Office will provide guidance on how to submit a full application.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE WEBINAR

The Washington State Office will host a technical assistance call/webinar about this Request for Concept Papers on November 14th at 10:00 a.m. EST. If you are interested in participating, please RSVP by November 1st by sending an email to WA@cns.gov to register and receive details. Please email the following information:

- Contact Name(s)
- Email(s)
- Organization
- Phone Number

FOR MORE INFORMATION

The Washington State Office can be reached at 206-607-2603 or WA@cns.gov

If you experience technical questions about submitting your application through eGrants, please contact the [National Service Hotline](#) or call the Hotline at 1-800-942-2677.

TIMELINE

October 26	Request for Concept Papers Issued
November 10	Registration date for Technical Assistance webinar
November 14	Technical assistance call/Webinar, 10:00 a.m. PST
December 4	Deadline for Concept Paper submission via eGrants by 5:00 p.m.
Week of Dec. 18	WA State Office notification to applicants
January 22	Deadline for organizations with approved concept papers to submit full project application via eGrants
Week of Feb. 12	WA State Office notification to applicants on decisions
February 26	Final application approvals and Memoranda of Agreements signed
Week of March 5	New Sponsor Orientation individual meetings, dates/times will vary
March 22	New projects submit VISTA Service Opportunity listings and VISTA Assignment Descriptions in eGrants, begin recruitment
June-August	VISTA candidates attend required Pre-Service Orientation (PSO) and begin service. PSO dates will be confirmed by the WA State Office

RESOURCES

Successful applicants will demonstrate familiarity with the following:

- [AmeriCorps VISTA's governing legislation and applicable federal regulations, including:](#)
 - [Domestic Volunteer Act of 1973 \(as amended\)](#)
 - [Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act of 2009 \(Public Law 113-13, October 2009\)](#)
 - [Code of Federal Regulations, Title 45, Chapter 25 Part 2556](#)
- [FY2018 AmeriCorps VISTA Program Guidance](#)
- [AmeriCorps VISTA Concept Paper Guidelines and Instructions](#)
- [How to Create and Manage an eGrants Account](#) presentation
- [AmeriCorps VISTA Sponsor Guide](#)
- [VISTA 101: Understanding VISTA](#) (online tutorial)
- [VISTA 201: How to apply for an AmeriCorps VISTA Project](#)
- [AmeriCorps VISTA Performance Measure resources](#)
- [AmeriCorps VISTA Campus](#) is the online learning environment for members, supervisors and sponsors

